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## **Those Who Dared To Be Different: Integrated Education in Northern Ireland**

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# **Those Who Dared To Be Different: Integrated Education in Northern Ireland**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the long-term impact of segregated and integrated education on the political identities and attitudes of the adult population in Northern Ireland. Using a pooled sample from the 1998 and 2003 Northern Ireland Election Surveys and the Northern Ireland Life and Times and Social Attitudes Surveys from 1998 onwards, we address, for the first time, the question of whether or not religiously integrated education – both formal and informal – has a significant effect on political outlooks. The results suggest that attendance at an informally or formally religiously integrated school has some positive long-term benefits in promoting a more integrationist and less sectarian stance in relation to national identity and constitutional preferences. Irrespective of whether members of the Protestant or Catholic community were considered, individuals who had attended an informally or formally integrated school were notably more likely to abandon traditional identities and territorial allegiances than those whose educational experiences were exclusively restricted to a religiously segregated setting. These results add weight to previous case studies which have shown that an integrated school can and does have an impact on the outlooks of those who attend them and that the positive effects of integrated schooling extends into later life. As the numbers experiencing integrated schooling grows, these individuals have the potential to create a new common ground in Northern Ireland politics.

## Those Who Dared To Be Different: Integrated Education in Northern Ireland

Traditionally, education has been seen as an institution which reflects the social differences that exist in society and which are reproduced from generation to generation through socialization. More recent views of education are that it is an institution with the capacity to create social change, by identifying the sources of conflict and developing strategies to ameliorate them. This was particularly the case in the United States where the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) heralded a new era in educational policy. Deeming racially segregated schools unconstitutional, the Supreme Court decision triggered a shift in the perception of school; schools came to be regarded as institutions with the potential to improve racial and ethnic group relations by diversifying students' social networks and thereby reducing racism and prejudice (see Zirkel and Cantor, 2004). Thus, in addition to improving students' life chances, a key goal was that school integration and contact between "the races" would lead to a change in "hearts and minds", the lessening of racist attitudes among Whites and, ultimately, to more integration in other aspects of society (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954: 494).

These diverging views of the role of education also came into sharp relief in Northern Ireland when the civil disturbances began in 1968. Although initially viewed as 'oases of calm', where sectarianism and conflict were left at the school gates, the segregated school system became an increasingly source of concern for many educators and community activists. An increasing number of parents and teachers began to endorse the view that schools should become involved directly in cross-community efforts to improve community relations, albeit via a series of contact schemes and joint initiatives (see Darby, 1976; Dunn, 1986). Early academic research also lent some support to this view (see Murray, 1985; Dunn et al., 1991). Highlighting the lack of contact and cooperation for the majority of teachers and pupils between Protestant and Catholic schools, researchers began to increasingly point to the segregated educational system as a key contributory factor in perpetuating the conflict, although there was a dearth of empirical evidence to either support or reject the hypothesis. Despite the passage of nearly four decades and numerous policy initiatives, this lack of empirical investigation continues to this day. This is particularly the case when the long-term effects of integrated schooling, or its impact on the adult population, is considered (Abbott et al., 1998; McGlynn, 2003).

This article examines the impact of segregated and integrated education on

political attitudes and identities. Using a pooled sample of the 1998 and 2003 Northern Ireland Election Surveys and the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys from 1998 onwards (see Appendix, data section), we address, for the first time, the question of whether or not integrated education – both formal and informal – has a significant effect on the identities and constitutional preferences of the adult population in Northern Ireland. Contemporary explanations of the conflict suggest that it is differences in relation to these religiously-based ethnonationalist identities – British Protestants who wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom versus Irish Catholics who desire the reunification of the island of Ireland – which gives Northern Ireland politics its distinctive character. Some commentators go so far as to suggest that it is this clash between two opposing and monolithic identity blocks that lies at the root of the conflict and which has resulted in the death of more than 3,000 people since 1969 (see McGarry and O’Leary, 1995; Hayes and McAllister, 2001).

The first part of the article outlines the development of the educational system as well as current patterns of schooling, integrated versus segregated, in Northern Ireland. We then examine the nature and extent of integrated education, both formal and informal, among the adult population. Finally, building on our previous analysis, we investigate the consequences of exposure to the two differing educational systems – integrated versus segregated – on identity patterns and constitutional preferences of the adult population within this society.

Although educational segregation on the basis of religion is not unique to Northern Ireland, its particular importance for this society should not be underestimated. Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society in that not only are the two main religious communities – Protestant and Catholic – educated separately, but they are also segregated both residentially and in their work places, and display extremely low levels of religious mobility and intermarriage (Breen and Hayes, 1996; Breen and Devine, 1999). In fact, for many people, their first contact with a member of the opposing religious tradition and culture may not be until third level education or adulthood. It is for this reason – its conjunction with division in the wider society – that educational segregation on the basis of religious denomination remains a crucial issue within this society (Dunn and Morgan, 1991).

## **Religion and the Educational System**

Since its foundation in 1921, Northern Ireland has had two separate, religiously based educational systems at both the primary and secondary levels. The state

(‘controlled’) system is attended by Protestants with a number of voluntary grammar schools also attended predominantly by Protestants. Catholics attend schools which are all voluntary (as opposed to state controlled) and, although also state financed, are operated by the Catholic Church administered through the Council of Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and commonly known as the maintained sector. This bipartite system long predates the present constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland. Prior to partition, most schools were owned by church authorities. The first Education Act passed by the new Northern Ireland parliament in 1923 attempted to negate this inherited bipartite system and replace church schools with a single unified system in which there would be no denominational slant in organisation, administration, staffing or curriculum. The Act, however, was vehemently rejected by all churches, Protestant and Catholic. So widespread was the opposition to the proposed new system within the churches that by 1930 the government was forced to establish a de facto segregated education system, a situation which continues to this day. For example, a crucial component of the 1930 Education Act was the change in the management structure and source of financial support accorded to ‘voluntary’ schools. In particular, not only was the management of voluntary schools broadened to include the clergy but they could also receive half their funding from the state. In practice, these changes meant that Catholic schools could survive financially outside the state sector, or the Protestant school system, albeit at a comparatively financially disadvantaged position. This discrepancy in funding was partially negated in 1968 when the government abolished the voluntary contribution towards maintenance costs for voluntary schools converting to maintained status although it was not until the early 1990s that the discrepancy in capital funding – until then, Catholic schools had to secure one fifth of all capital costs – was finally eliminated (see McGrath, 2000, for a detailed and historical discussion of this issue).

In addition to their religious composition and management structure, the most obvious difference between the two educational systems is the curriculum and for the most part, the fact that children take different subjects, learn different religions, read different books, and more importantly of all, learn different histories (see Magee, 1970; Darby, 1974; Darby et al., 1977; Murray, 1985). Gallagher (1995) studied the subjects taken by a sample of school students attending different grammar schools. He found that the largest differences were in culturally specific subjects; for example, while 82 per cent of the Catholic pupils took religious education, the same figure for Protestants was just 21 per cent. Similarly, while 23 per cent of Catholics studied the Irish language, no Protestants took the subject. Protestant students were more numerous than Catholics across most of the science subjects, notably biology and mathematics. More importantly, however, there was some evidence to suggest

that even when religious education was conducted at either the primary or secondary level, there was little attempt to deal with 'the problems of comparative religion which lies at the root of so many problems in Northern Ireland, the Protestant-Catholic division' (see Greer in Gallagher, 1995: 26).

More than religious education, however, is the differences encountered in the teaching of history in Protestant and Catholic schools (Gallagher, 2003: 65-66). For decades Catholic children were taught Irish history, often with overtly political overtones. In many history books there was an obsession with the Anglo-Irish conflict and Sean Farren found in some a 'justification for the nationalist cause in terms that could often be accused of bias and of a lack of proper historical perspective' (Farren, 1976:29). Similarly, Protestant children were rarely taught about Irish history, except when it related to British history. While many of these biases have been addressed since the 1970s, most notably through the introduction of a common curriculum in 1990, albeit on a voluntary basis, it still remains the case that a Catholic is likely to study more Irish history than a Protestant, and a Protestant will study more British history than a Catholic.

Recently government statistics confirm the continuance of this religiously segregated education system (see Table 1). Based on the religious composition of pupils in Northern Ireland schools in 2002-2003, the data show that while 94 per cent of Protestant children attended a 'controlled' or state school, the equivalent figure among Catholic children attending a Catholic-maintained school was 92 per cent. A similar, albeit converse, pattern occurs when transfers between the two educational sectors is examined. For example, only one per cent of Protestant children attended a Catholic-maintained school, while four percent of Catholics attending a controlled school. More specifically, of the 301,633 children from either a Protestant or Catholic background enrolled in schools in 2002-2003, just 8,197 children (or 2.7 per cent) attended a segregated school different to their own religion. Only in relation to the 'Other' category is there any evidence to suggest some crossover of students between the two religiously divided educational sectors, with 70 per cent attending a de facto Protestant school and 12 per cent a Catholic one. It is important to note, however, that not only do pupils within this category account for just 0.3 per cent of all school children in 2002-2003 but they are predominantly drawn from the statistically very small ethnic populations in Northern Ireland (see Osborne, 2004:72).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

This is not to deny, however, the small percentage of children who attend an

integrated school, officially defined by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) as schools which have a 30 per cent minimum enrolment from whichever side of the community forms a minority within that school. Currently, religiously integrated schools account for approximately five per cent of all students. There is evidence to suggest that attendance at an integrated school is disproportionately concentrated among those with neither a Protestant or Catholic background. For example, whereas only six per cent and four per cent of Protestant and Catholic children, respectively, attend an integrated school, the equivalent proportion among the 'Other' category is 18 per cent. However, a higher proportion of Protestant children as compared to their Catholic counterparts attend an integrated school.

The establishment of integrated schooling is a relatively new phenomenon in Northern Ireland (see Figure 1). It was not until 1981 and against vitriolic objections from church leaders in both religious communities that the first integrated school, Lagan College, was established, at the behest of parents (see O'Connor, 2002, for a detailed historical account of this issue). So great was opposition to its establishment that it was originally funded from private sources, most notably the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Nuffield foundation, although in 1984 it finally achieved government funding and became a grant maintained college. Since then, on average, between two and three new integrated schools a year have been opened, all established either by grassroots initiative or through a parental ballot to give an existing school integrated status. By 2004 there were 57 schools with a total enrolment of 17,149 pupils. Of these 57 schools, the vast majority – 67 per cent or 38 schools – are at the primary level, as compared to 33 per cent, or just 19 schools, at the post-primary level. As a consequence of parental initiatives and the subsequent achievement in government funding, usually after a one or two year period in operation, the integrated education sector has flourished since 1989. Government figures show that in 2001-2002, 3.2 per cent of primary schoolchildren were in integrated schools, compared to 2.4 per cent in 1998-1999 and a total of 10.0 per cent of secondary school children attended integrated schools in 2001-2002, compared to 5.7 per cent in 1998-1999 (see Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) for further statistical information and a detailed account of this issue).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Recent data confirms these findings (see Table 2). Although a bipartite system based on religious segregation still remains the norm, there is evidence to suggest religious mixing, particularly within the secondary school sector. For example,

irrespective of religious background, just over one in ten children of all secondary school pupils attended an integrated school, compared to just 3 percent at the primary level.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

A similar pattern emerges when each of the religious groupings is considered separately. Only three per cent of all Protestant primary school children attend an integrated school, compared to 13 per cent of secondary school children. This preference for integrated education, particularly at the secondary level, is again disproportionately concentrated among the “Other/Non-Stated” religious category. In contrast to their Protestant and Catholic counterparts, the proportion of children attending an integrated school accounts for nearly one fifth of all secondary children within this religious grouping. Although the proportion of children attending an integrated primary school is considerably less by comparison – accounting for just six per cent of all primary school children – it is still nearly double the equivalent proportion of children from within the Protestant community and three times that of children from a Catholic background.

The establishment and growth of integrated schools in Northern Ireland is a remarkable achievement. This achievement has not been without tension and conflict (see Dunn and Morgan, 1999), particularly since the mid-1990s, where government attempts to restrict educational expenditure has discouraged further integration. Although the transformation of existing schools to integrated status was legally conceded as far back as the late 1970s (Education NI Act, 1977) when to avoid closure just one school took this step, to date only around a dozen schools have embarked on this route, all of which have been pre-existing state controlled schools traditionally associated with the Protestant community (see Smith, 2001: 571). And, while some have welcomed their establishment, supporters of integration have either rejected this approach as unworkable or have expressed concerns about many aspects of the process, such as the proportion of cross-community enrolment necessary, or the achievement of a balanced staff. For example, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), a vocal critic of transformation, argues that transformed schools are unworkable because of the impossibility of a school with a history of identification with one tradition to be able to not only replicate the necessary conditions of balance between the two communities but also to achieve an atmosphere of mutual respect for both traditions (see NICIE, 1997). In fact, many supporters of integration remain deeply suspicious that transformation is actually a dilution of integration for economic expediency.

## Integration Among the Adult Population

Although official government statistics on the extent of religious mixing at the school level, albeit increasing, still remain quite low in Northern Ireland, there is some survey evidence to suggest a much less segregated picture at least as far as levels of informal integration within the adult population are concerned. The 2003 Life and Times Survey found that just over one in ten adults had attended a religiously mixed school. Between 1989 and 2003, 13.5 per cent of Northern Ireland adults claimed to have attended a religiously mixed school. This is, of course, a very considerable overestimate of those attending a formally integrated school, which official government statistics suggests accounts for only 1.7 per cent of the current adult population.

What explains this discrepancy in the findings? Briefly put, most of the respondents who said that they attended an integrated school are interpreting the question as whether or not there were any pupils of the opposite religion at their school, rather than whether or not it was a formally constituted integrated school. Thus, while it could be argued that this measure has limited utility, it does have value in showing the proportion of the population who had some experience of meeting children of the opposite religion in the educational system, albeit not in a formally integrated context. When the proportion of adults who had attended a ‘formally integrated’ versus a ‘fairly mixed’ school is disaggregated (see Appendix, methods section) this leads to a much lower estimate of 1.4 per cent of the total adult population between 1998 and 2003 attending an integrated school, very close to the government estimate of 1.7 per cent. By contrast, 10.2 per cent who report attending a mixed school said that it was not formally integrated, just one that was ‘fairly mixed’ (see Table 3). The accuracy of these results is further supported by the age distribution of the respondents experiencing formally integrated education: of those aged 18 to 24 years old when interviewed, 4.4 per cent said that they had attended a formally integrated school, compared to just 0.5 per cent of those aged 70 or over.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Also of note in Table 3 is the somewhat lower proportion of Protestants (87 per cent) as compared to Catholics (90 per cent) who reported attending a segregated school and the comparatively higher proportion – 12 per cent as compared to 8 per cent – within a fairly mixed school-setting. This suggests that there may be a pattern whereby Protestant parents are more likely to send their children to a non-segregated school as compared to Catholic parents; a not unexpected finding given that the

raison d'être of Catholic schools is to provide an education for Catholic children. Multivariate analysis supports this finding. Protestants were significantly less likely to have attended a non-segregated school, albeit within a mixed setting, than their Catholic counterparts, even when a range of background characteristics such as age and gender were included in the analysis (see Appendix, Table A2).

The key characteristic of education in Northern Ireland is the existence of two parallel – Protestant-controlled and Catholic-maintained – religious school systems, catering for Protestant and Catholics students separately. This monolithic system shows some signs of erosion and there is a small, but growing, integrated education sector, attracting students not only from both religious traditions but from all socio-economic backgrounds (see Gallagher et al., 2003: 17). Current government statistics suggest that this sector now accounts for five per cent of the school population, with the demand for places in both primary and post-primary schools exceeding supply (McGlynn et al., 2004). For example, in September 2004, over 670 applicants for places in integrated schools had to be turned away due to lack of places (NICIE, 2004a). Moreover, recent survey research suggests that almost three-quarters of parents want more integrated schools and that more parents would opt for integrated education if the opportunities were available (see Gallagher and Smith, 2002: 125). Even within the segregated system, a small minority of children, around three per cent, cross the religious divide and attend a segregated school different to their own religion. Finally, there is additional survey evidence to suggest a notable minority of adults have attended an integrated school, especially an informally integrated, or a fairly mixed one.

## **The Consequences of Integrated Education Within A Contact Hypothesis Perspective**

One of the most frequently applied approaches to conflict resolution is the contact hypothesis. This is also the case in Northern Ireland, where this approach to both preventing and reducing the ethno-political conflict has been widely endorsed by both the government and the academic community (see Gallagher, 2003; Niens et al., 2003). Originally developed by Williams (1947) and elaborated by Allport (1958), in its most simple form, the contact hypothesis proposes that intergroup conflict can be reduced by bringing together individuals from opposing groups. One of the underlying assumptions is that conflict arises from lack of information about the other group and from lack of opportunities to obtain information about members of the other group. Thus, according to the contact hypothesis, one of the most

productive ways to reduce intergroup conflict is to encourage and promote contact between members of different racial and/or ethnic groups. This, in turn, it is argued will result in more tolerant and positive attitudes towards each other. For this to happen, Allport (1958) suggested that four core conditions need to be met: a) equal status between the groups in the situation; b) common goals; c) no competition between groups; and d) the contact situation should be legitimised through institutional support. Although the contact hypothesis has been the focus of much criticism over the past fifty years, most recent research suggests that under optimal conditions – structural programmes that ensure that all of most of Allport's conditions are met – prejudice can be successfully reduced (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2000).

Using contact theory as their frame of reference, critics of the Northern Ireland educational system also point to the lack of contact between children from the two main religious communities as a crucial factor in both causing and maintaining the conflict. They suggest that by separating Protestant and Catholic children, the education system in Northern Ireland has exacerbated community divisions and the conflict in a number of ways. It is argued that it leads to ignorance about the other community and, in the words of Seamus Dunn, fosters 'an atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion' (Dunn, 1986: 311). Such prejudices and stereotypical beliefs about the other community that exist are likely to be reinforced, rather than questioned and re-evaluated. Segregated schools thus tend to reflect the negative attitudes of the broader society, reproducing them from generation to generation and serving to perpetuate community divisions. The anxiety expressed by Dunn regarding the impact of separated schooling is echoed by other academics who feel that it leads to sectarian defensiveness, bigotry and fear and suspicion (McEwan, 1990; McEwan and Salters, 1993; Wright, 1993). Others, however, remain unconvinced. While not denying the impact of the segregated school system, Gallagher (1994) suggests that the real problem lies with the inequalities and injustices that are to be found throughout Northern Irish society, though the education sector still has a role to play in addressing these issues.

Mindful of the role of segregated schools in perpetuating community divisions, the overarching goal of integrated schools is to foster an understanding of both the dominant traditions, and to overcome negative stereotypes. By educating children from both religious communities together and encouraging them to understand these historical and religious differences, it is hoped that they will feel less threatened by the cultures and traditions of the other community, and be more likely to respect

them, as well as to form enduring cross-community relations. In the most contentious area, religious education, integrated schools provide inter-denominational religious education required by the parents. In the other area of contention, the teaching of history, the integrated curriculum emphasizes local history in order to try and create a common heritage (see NICIE, 2004b). This is not to suggest, however, that all staff in integrated schools have been equally proactive in achieving these goals. For example, Donnelly (2004) in a recent case-study of teaching practices in one integrated secondary school not only found considerable disparity among teachers with regard to how an ethos of tolerance and respect could be created and maintained in the school but many teachers admitted to adopting a 'culture of avoidance' whereby politically or religiously contentious issues were either glossed over or judiciously avoided. However, perhaps, more so than any other factor, the key difference between integrated and segregated schools is their commitment to constitutional and structural safeguards to encourage joint ownership by the two traditions. For example, all integrated schools have adopted the principle that both students and staff should be drawn from both cultural traditions and it is not unusual for parents from both religious communities to constitute roughly half of the governing body in integrated schools (Smith, 2001).

What are the consequences of integrated education on values and beliefs? Are individuals who have experienced an integrated education different in their outlooks compared to those who have attended segregated schools? The empirical studies that have investigated this issue are inconclusive (see McGlynn et al., 2004 for a review). Although a number of studies stress the positive benefits of integrated schooling, particularly in promoting cross-community friendships and an integrationist view of community relations, others are more ambiguous, suggesting that it has little or no impact in promoting shared cultural outlooks. Some commentators even suggest that integrated education may actually reinforce divisive ethnic and political views.

The first major investigation of this issue by Irwin (1991) found an increase in the number and duration of inter-community friendships among pupils enrolled in an integrated school. Based on an evaluation of the friendship choices of Protestant and Catholic pupils, he found that after just five years of secondary education in an integrated school not only did pupils who had attended a segregated primary school have more friends from the 'other' community than their own but, contrary to earlier research on short-term cross-community contact projects (see Trew, 1986), these friendships continued into adulthood. In fact, not only did past pupils from this integrated school continue to maintain a significant number of friends from the 'other' community despite a series of discouraging circumstances such as segregated

housing, but this was particularly the case when their level of contact was compared to young adults of the same age in an integrated university.

Later research has confirmed these findings (see Stringer et al., 2000; McGlynn, 2003; McGlynn et al., 2004). Stringer et al., (2000) compared 1,732 pupils from integrated and non-integrated schools and found that pupils in integrated schools reported higher levels of out-of-school contact with members of the 'other' community than children in segregated schools, and took a more integrative position on mixed marriage and integrated education. There is again evidence to suggest that the integrationist attitudes formed during this period persisted long after the school experience, even extending to the choice of a marital partner. McGlynn (2003), in the first retrospective study of 159 past pupils of integrated schools, not only found strong integrationist views among her adult sample but in many cases these views had extended to the choice of marital partners, with more than half of the past pupils having a partner from a different religious and cultural background. This is in direct contrast to the national average which, according to the most recent survey data, stands at only ten per cent of the adult population (NILT, 2003). A key factor contributing to this outcome was the school environment and not parental influence. As McGlynn (2003: 20-21) concludes: 'The notion that the integrated schools in this study were preaching only to liberal middle class pupils is very much contested. Indeed it must be noted that in this sample eighty per cent had little or no contact with the "other side" prior to integrated school. As such the broadening of identity perspective of the former students may perhaps be attributed more to school experience than to parental influence.'

Although research suggests the positive influence of integrated schooling on community attitudes, the evidence in relation to its impact on religious and political identities is much less conclusive. Although McClenahan et al., (1996) found that cross-community friendships were increased by intergroup contact, she also failed to detect any change in national or socio-political identity as a result of co-education. Again, later research by McGlynn (2003) on the adult population lends some further support to these findings. Although this study again found that the overwhelming majority (93 per cent) of past pupils felt that integrated education had a significant positive impact on their lives, religious identity was unaffected and there was also little impact on political identity. In fact, in a small minority of cases, self-perceptions of religious and ethnic identity had been strengthened, rather than diminished, as a result of integrated education.

Research on the effects of desegregation on both the student and adult population

in the US lends support to these findings (see Schofield, 1995; Wells and Crain, 1994; Holme et al., 2005; Wells et al., 2005). Although a review of earlier research on the school-going population suggested that the impact of desegregated education on intergroup relations was both “inconclusive and “inconsistent” (see Schofield, 1995: 611), later survey-based research underscored the significance of desegregation in shaping the racial attitudes and experiences of students. Pointing to the positive effects of desegregation on racial attitudes, these later studies consistently show that attending a racially integrated school significantly improved inter-group relations and increased students’ comfort in and ability to operate effectively in inter-racial settings. Minority students who had attended integrated schools were also more likely to attend and succeed in college and to live and work in interracial settings (see Wells and Crain, 1994; Eaton, 2001; The Civil Rights Project, 2002).

The only available comprehensive study of the long-term impact of school desegregation on the adult population further confirms these findings (see Holme et al., 2005; Wells et al., 2005). Based on a retrospective study of 242 graduates from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds who attended racially mixed high schools in the late 1970s, the study found that attending a racially mixed high school not only reduced racial prejudice but also helped to promote a deeper understanding of racial differences and provided students with a confidence that they felt that they would not have otherwise acquired to interact in racially diverse settings. A crucial factor in contributing to this confidence was not the type of lessons learned in the classroom but the personal day-to-day experiences that students encountered in negotiating an inter-racial setting. In fact, there little discussion about race and racial inequality within these racially diverse high schools, many of which were re-segregated on academic grounds and, in the vast majority of schools, race was often a ‘taboo’ subject.

It is important to note, however, that the benefits of desegregated education, or the lessons acquired by these students in negotiating an inter-racial setting, were ‘hindsight’ lessons which they only became aware of as adults. In fact, it was not until after they had left school and attended college or entered the workplace did these graduates realise what they had learned and the benefits of their experiences vis-à-vis their peers who had not attended diverse schools. This is not to deny, however, their subsequent re-segregation within adult society. Paradoxically, the vast majority of these graduates and their children had currently little or no contact with individuals of another racial group and were highly segregated in terms of housing, employment, social interaction and religious observance. As Holme et al. (2005: 23), in assessing the long-term impact of desegregated education on the US

population, concludes: 'Although our data show that these graduates had not changed the world – in fact most have (often unwittingly) done their part as adults to perpetuate our segregated society – our findings do suggest that the experience of attending racially diverse schools may break down the cycle of segregation by giving them increased comfort in racially mixed settings, and decreased fear of racially mixed environments.'

In summary, then, while there is a growing body of national and cross-national evidence to suggest that integrated or co-education has a significant and positive influence on the lives of those who experience it, most notably in terms of reducing prejudicial attitudes as well as promoting a sense of security in religious, racial or ethnically diverse environments, its impact on socio-political attitudes remains inconclusive. As far as ethnic or religious identity in Northern Ireland is concerned, there is some evidence to suggest that integrated education may, in fact, have the opposite effect in reinforcing such allegiances. It is to an investigation of the impact of integrated education on identities and constitutional preferences within the adult population that we now turn.

It is important to note, however, that one caveat surrounding these results is the inability to determine causality. Since our forthcoming analysis is based on aggregated cross-sectional surveys, we do not know the outlooks of the respondents or their parents before they entered an integrated school. For example, it could be argued that more liberally-minded parents are more likely to send their children to integrated schools, and that any effects we attribute to schooling may in fact be due to selectivity among parents. More recent research, however, casts some serious doubt upon this interpretation. As our earlier review of the literature demonstrates clearly not only are pupils in integrated schools drawn from a variety of social backgrounds but because they attract children who had little or not contact with the 'other side' prior to integrated schooling, this suggests that it is the school environment and not parental influence which determines their attitudes (see McGlynn, 2003: 11-28). This is an issue, however, that can only be comprehensively resolved by extensive, long-term panel studies which are currently not available.

## **National and Political Identity**

In terms of national and political identity, the results in Table 4 lend support to the contact thesis, and the positive long-term effects of integrated schooling in promoting more integrationist views, at least as far as the adult Protestant population are concerned. Clear differences emerge among Protestants in support for

the two dominant identities – British and unionist – between those who had attended a formally integrated school and those who had not. As a group, Protestants who had attended an integrated school were notably less likely to endorse either a British or unionist identity than those who had attended either a segregated school or one that was just fairly mixed. Whereas at least seven out of every ten Protestants who had attended either a segregated or informally integrated school chose either a British or unionist identity, the equivalent figure among those who had experienced a formally integrated education was notably lower at just 63 per cent (British) and 54 per cent (unionist) respectively.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

A converse pattern emerges when a Northern Irish identity or the absence of a political label is considered. Protestants who had attended an integrated school not only were more likely than those who had not to choose a Northern Irish identity but they were also more likely to reject a unionist label in favour of the intermediate ‘neither’ position. Over two-fifths of Protestants who had attended an integrated school as compared to around one-fifth of those who had experienced a segregated education adopted this intermediate stance. However, perhaps the most striking pattern is the marked unwillingness of Protestants to cross traditional allegiances and associate with the opposing identity, a result all the more persuasive given their lack of indecision in relation to this issue. In both instances, less than one per cent of Protestants opted for the “don’t know” category when asked to indicate their national and political identity. Even among those educated in formally integrated schools, almost no Protestant was willing to identify himself or herself as Irish or adopt a nationalist identity. Thus, Protestants who had experienced a formally integrated education may be considered to occupy the middle ground of Northern Ireland politics in that they are willing to detach themselves from the dominant poles of identity – British and unionist – but remain unwilling to cross over to the identity of the other side.

This is not the case for the adult Catholic population, where support for the two dominant identities within their community – Irish and nationalist – is not as clearly differentiated by educational sector, although the key distinguishing factor in this instance is attendance at an informally integrated school. Catholics who had attended an informally integrated school were less likely to endorse an Irish identity than those who had attended either a religiously segregated school or one that was formally integrated. Furthermore, in comparison to those who had experienced a segregated education, they are also more likely to choose a Northern Irish label and

adopt the intermediate ‘neither’ position in relation to their political identity. However, again, there is a marked unwillingness among Catholics to cross traditional allegiances and associate with the opposing identity. Even among those educated in either an informal or formally integrated setting, almost no Catholic was willing to adopt a unionist label and, irrespective of school background, just one-in-ten was willing to identify himself or herself as British.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Nevertheless, integrated education remains important in shaping identity patterns. When the impact of congruency in identity is considered, it is again Protestants who had attended an integrated school who stand out as being the least traditionalist or rigid in their views (see Table 5). Protestants who had attended an integrated school were less likely to identify themselves as *both* British and unionist than those who had not. Among Catholics, in contrast, the key factor was attendance at a non-segregated school. Irrespective of whether the formal or informal integrated educational sector was considered, Catholics who had attended a non-segregated school were notably less likely to identify themselves as *both* Irish and nationalist than those who had attended a segregated one. Multivariate analysis lends supports these findings (see Appendix, Table A3). After a range of background variables were included in the analysis, Protestants who had attended an integrated school were significantly less likely to hold a British-Unionist identity than those who had experienced a segregated education. A similar pattern emerges among the Catholics community, albeit among those who attended an informally mixed school. Catholics who had attended an informally integrated school were significantly less likely to hold *both* an Irish and nationalist identity than their colleagues who had attended a religiously segregated school.

## Constitutional Preferences

To what extent are there differences in constitutional preferences when the impact of the educational sector is considered? Are individuals who have attended a formally integrated school more likely to discount traditional territorial allegiances than those who have experienced a more religiously segregated education? Focusing initially on the Protestant community, Table 6 shows a clear pattern. Protestants who had attended an integrated school are more likely to move away from their traditional territorial allegiance – maintenance of the link with Britain – and express an undecided position than those who had experienced either an informally integrated or segregated education. The overwhelming majority of Protestants who

had attended either a fairly mixed or segregated school – over 81 per cent in both instances – favoured retention of the union with Britain; by contrast, the equivalent proportion among those who had experienced a formally integrated education was just 65 per cent.

A converse pattern emerges when those who failed to express an opinion on the issue are examined; just six per cent of those who had experienced a segregated education expressed this indecisive view, compared to 15 per cent among the formally integrated. Again, a notable finding is the marked unwillingness of Protestants to cross traditional allegiances in their constitutional preferences. Very few Protestants were willing to support the reunification of Ireland, or even an independent Northern Ireland for that matter, and there were few differences between the various educational sectors.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

Constitutional preferences within the Catholic population are not as clearly differentiated by educational sector, although the key distinguishing factor is attendance at an integrated school (both formal and informal) versus a segregated one. In general, Catholics who had attended either a formal or informal integrated school were more likely than their religiously segregated colleagues to abandon their traditional territorial allegiance by either supporting maintenance of the link with Britain or expressing an undecided position in relation to this issue. Just over half of Catholics who had attended a segregated school supported the re-unification of Ireland, compared to 35 per cent who had attended a formally integrated school. As noted previously the most important finding is the willingness of Catholics to cross traditional boundaries and associate with the opposing territorial allegiance. Overall, just over one-fifth of Catholics support the link with Britain and a similar proportion remain undecided.

Multivariate analysis further supports these findings (see Appendix, Table A4). Even when a range of background variables were included in the analysis, Protestants who had attended an integrated school were significantly *less* likely than those who had attended a segregated school to support retention of the union with Britain. By contrast, Catholics who had attended an informally integrated school were significantly *more* likely to do so than their segregated colleagues. This is not to deny, however, the greater importance of other determinants, most notably congruency in national identity.

## Conclusion

Throughout the long-running debate about the relationship between education and social development there has been a continuing tension between models which emphasise the importance of education as a mirror which reflects the values and structures of a society and helps to maintain and perpetuate them and those which view the educational system as a potential agent for change. This was particularly the case in the US when following the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v Board of Education*, the educational system was both legally and formally identified as the institution that could initiate social change. By bringing together in the same school environment children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, it was hoped that the educational system could transform race relations and change the “hearts and minds” of American society. Although a similar interpretation of the role of education as an instrument of social change came somewhat later to Northern Ireland, by the 1980s, popular opinion as well as official government policy had also increasingly endorsed this view. And, while support for the role of education in ameliorating racial and ethnic divisions has been more or less abandoned in the United States (see Cashin, 2004), this is not the case in Northern Ireland. As recent opinion poll data attests, not only is the current demand for places in integrated schools vastly outstripping supply, but the vast majority of the adult public support the further establishment of integrated schools.

To what extent did these earlier parental initiatives in establishing integrated schools prove correct in their assumption that they would break down religious barriers and herald in a new era in community relations in Northern Ireland society? While the results of this study cannot provide a definitive answer to this question, they do suggest that attendance at an informally or formally integrated school has some positive long-term benefits in promoting a more integrationist and less sectarian stance in relation to political outlooks.

Our evidence in support of this proposition is threefold. First, irrespective of religion, those who had attended an informally or formally integrated school were more likely to abandon traditional identities and territorial allegiances than those whose educational experiences were exclusively restricted to a religious segregated setting. Second, this is particularly the case among Protestants, where clear differences in identity patterns and constitutional preferences emerged between those who had attended a formally integrated school and those who had not. As a group, Protestants who had attended an integrated school were more likely than those who had not to reject a British identity in favour of a Northern Irish label and

to occupy the intermediate position in terms of their political identity and constitutional preferences. Third, there are also positive effects of integrated schooling, albeit within an informal setting, on Catholics. Not only were Catholics who had attended a 'fairly mixed' school more likely than those who had attended a religiously segregated one to occupy the centre ground in identity politics, they were also notably more likely to disavow bi-partisan constitutional preferences altogether and accept the opposing territorial allegiance.

These results, tentative as they are, add weight to the studies which have shown that integrated schools can and do have an impact on the outlooks of the pupils who attend them. Moreover our study – based on a large sample of the adult population – suggests that the positive effects of integrated schooling extend into later life. As the numbers experiencing integrated schooling grows, these individuals have the potential to create a new common ground in Northern Ireland politics. As Northern Ireland attempts to move out of conflict, the importance of this group should not be underestimated. Despite the formal ratification of the Northern Ireland Agreement in 1998, and its many concerted efforts to enhance the centre ground in politics, more recent research suggests that Northern Ireland has become more, not less, religiously divided in the post-Agreement period and this is particularly the case when electoral behaviour is concerned (see Hayes and McAllister, 2004).

It is important to note, however, that the interaction between integrated education and community relations in Northern Ireland is both complex and contentious. A quarter of a century since the first integrated college was established claims and counter-claims abound as to the benefits of integrated education in breaking down religious and cultural barriers. This is particularly the case in terms of its possible long-term effectiveness within the general population, where, to date, previous research on this issue remains extremely limited; an omission all the more problematic in light of American findings as to the "hindsight" nature of the experiences learned in desegregated schools. It is to this issue – the long-term impact of integrated education on the adult population – that future research should be directed. Building on this analysis, not only should this research critically examine the role of integrated education in promoting more integrationist views among the general adult population but, where possible, this study should be undertaken using panel data. Only via such data, or a longitudinal approach, can definite conclusions be drawn about the causal effects of integrated education on identities, attitudes and behaviour. This research should also consider integrated education as part of the broader educational system in Northern Ireland, including comparisons not only with adults who had attended segregated schools but also those who claimed to have

had some contact, albeit within an informally integrated setting, with members of the other religious community. As our research also demonstrates, among the adult Catholic community at least, it is the presence of members of the other religious community in an informally integrated setting, rather than a formally integrated school per se, which leads to less sectarian views.

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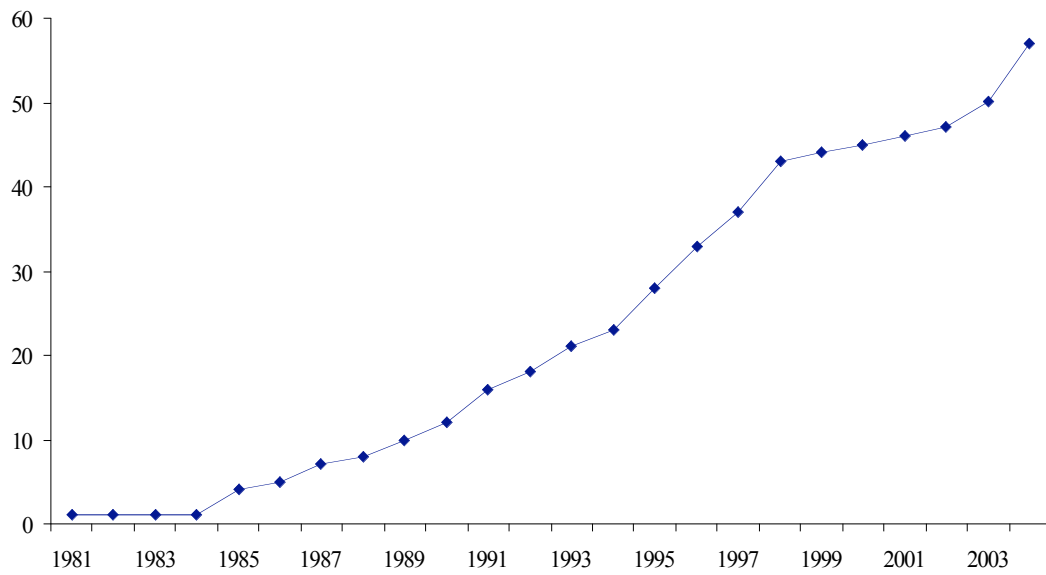
**Table 1: Religion of Pupils in Northern Ireland Schools, 2002-2003**

	(Percentages)				
	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not stated	All
Protestant-controlled	93.6	4.3	69.6	90.5	48.3
Catholic-maintained	0.9	92.2	12.4	2.8	47.1
Integrated	5.5	3.5	18.0	6.7	4.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(138,540)	(163,093)	(973)	(20,605)	(323,211)

Note: Protestants schools include 'controlled' or state schools at the primary and secondary level, which are *de facto* Protestant schools, as well as voluntary grammar schools and preparatory schools at the primary level which are fee-paying but state-subsidized departments attached to Protestant grammar schools. Catholic schools include Catholic-maintained schools at the primary and secondary level as well as voluntary Catholic grammar schools; integrated schools include grant-maintained and controlled integrated schools.

Source: Adapted from Osborne (2004).

**Figure 1: The Growth in Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland,  
1981-2004**



Source: Northern Ireland Council on Integrated Education Annual Reports, 1981-2004.

**Table 2: Religion of Pupils in Northern Ireland Schools by School Type, 2002-2003**

	(Percentages)		
	Primary	Secondary	Grammar
<b>Protestant/Other Christian:</b>			
Protestant-controlled	95.5	86.4	99.3
Catholic-maintained	1.1	0.6	0.7
Integrated	3.4	13.0	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(71,505)	(39,306)	(27,729)
<b>Catholic:</b>			
Protestant-controlled	4.2	1.6	8.7
Catholic-maintained	93.7	90.4	91.3
Integrated	2.1	8.0	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(83,041)	(49,530)	(30,522)
<b>Other/Not Stated:</b>			
Protestant-controlled	90.0	76.3	99.0
Catholic-maintained	3.6	5.1	1.0
Integrated	6.4	18.6	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(12,854)	(3,873)	(4,851)
<b>All:</b>			
Protestant-controlled	49.8	40.7	55.4
Catholic-maintained	47.2	48.7	44.6
Integrated	3.0	10.6	---
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(167,400)	(92,709)	(63,102)

Note: Protestants schools include 'controlled' or state schools at the primary and secondary level, which are *de facto* Protestant schools, as well as voluntary grammar schools and preparatory schools at the primary level which are fee-paying but state-subsidized departments attached to Protestant grammar schools. Catholic schools include Catholic-maintained schools at the primary and secondary level as well as voluntary Catholic grammar schools; integrated schools include grant-maintained and controlled integrated schools.

Source: Adapted from Osborne (2004).

**Table 3: Type of Education by Religion in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Percentages)		
	Protestant	Catholic	Total
<i>Integrated</i>			
Formally Integrated	1.1	1.7	1.4
Just fairly mixed	10.4	7.5	9.2
<i>Segregated</i>	88.4	90.8	89.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(6,720)	(4,677)	(11,397)

*Questions: 'Did you ever attend a mixed or integrated school in Northern Ireland, that is, a school with fairly large numbers of both Catholic and Protestant children?' 'Was this a formally integrated school or was it a school that was just fairly mixed?'*

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.

**Table 4: Parental Religion and Integrated Schooling in  
Northern Ireland,  
1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	Formally integrated		Just fairly mixed	
Parental religion:				
Catholic <sup>a</sup>	---	---	---	---
Protestant	-0.26	(.17)	0.36**	(.07)
Gender (female)	0.43*	(.18)	0.03	(.07)
Age:				
18-29 <sup>a</sup>	---	---	---	---
30-39	-0.64**	(.22)	-0.30**	(.11)
40-49	-1.13**	(.26)	-0.36**	(.11)
50-59	-1.00**	(.27)	-0.35**	(.11)
60-69	-1.49**	(.33)	-0.25*	(.11)
70+	-1.84**	(.36)	-0.20	(.11)
Constant	-3.08**		-2.24**	
(N)	(10,243)		(11,136)	

Notes: Logistic regression equations showing parameter estimates and (in parentheses) standard errors predicting the probability of formally integrated school or schooling in a fairly mixed school, as against segregated schooling; <sup>a</sup> omitted category of comparison; \*, statistically significant at 0.05 level of above; \*\*, statistically significant at 0.01 level of above.

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003.

**Table 5: Identities and Schooling by Religion in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Percentages)							
	Protestant				Catholic			
	Integrtd	Mixed	Segregtd	All	Integrtd	Mixed	Segregtd	All
<i>National Identity:</i>								
British	63.5	71.1	72.2	72.0	11.5	12.4	9.3	9.5
Irish	4.1	3.0	2.5	2.6	60.3	56.0	64.8	64.1
Ulster	4.1	5.6	8.2	7.8	1.3	0.3	0.6	0.6
Northern Irish	24.3	18.3	15.3	15.7	25.6	29.9	24.0	24.4
Other	4.1	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(74)	(699)	(5,903)	(6,676)	(78)	(348)	(4,186)	(4,612)
<i>Political Identity:</i>								
Unionist	54.8	70.0	73.2	72.6	0.0	1.7	1.0	1.0
Nationalist	2.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	59.5	56.9	66.4	65.6
Neither	42.5	29.3	26.0	26.5	40.5	41.4	32.6	33.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(73)	(686)	(5,843)	(6,602)	(79)	(343)	(4,166)	(4,588)

*Questions: 'Which of these best describes the way you think of yourself?'; 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist, or neither?'*

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.

**Table 6: Congruency of Religion, National and Political Identity by School Type in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Percentages)			
	Integrated	Mixed	Segregated	(Total)
Protestant: British-Unionist	36.2	55.4	57.5	(57.1)
Catholic: Irish-Nationalist	44.2	41.1	51.8	(50.9)

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.

**Table 7: The Impact of School Type on Congruency in Religious, National and Political Identity in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Regression Coefficients)			
	Protestants: British-Unionist		Catholics: Irish-Nationalist	
<i>Socio-demographic controls:</i>				
Gender (male)	.05**	(.05)	.13**	(.13)
Church attendance (attends)	.10**	(.08)	.11**	(.08)
Age (years)	.01**	(.08)	-.01**	(-.06)
Education:				
Tertiary	-.18**	(-.13)	-.07*	(-.05)
Secondary	-.05*	(-.05)	-.09**	(-.09)
No qualification <sup>a</sup>	---	---	---	---
Occupation (non-manual)	.03	(.03)	.01	(.01)
Employment (labour active)	.01	(.01)	-.01	(-.01)
<i>School Type:</i>				
Integrated	-.18*	(-.04)	-.04	(-.01)
Just mixed	.01	(.01)	-.11**	(-.06)
Segregated <sup>a</sup>	----	----	----	----
Constant	.40**		.49**	
R-squared	0.03		0.03	
(N)	(4,678)		(3,220)	

Note: Congruency is operationalised as 1 (congruent) and 0 (not congruent); Standardised regressions are in parentheses; <sup>a</sup>, dropped out category of comparison; \*, significant at the 0.05 level; \*\*, significant at the 0.01 level..

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.

**Table 8: Constitutional Preferences and Schooling by Religion in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Percentages)							
	Protestant				Catholic			
	Integrtd	Mixed	Segregtd	All	Integrtd	Mixed	Segregtd	All
UK	65.8	80.8	85.0	84.4	23.1	27.5	19.9	20.5
United Ireland	5.5	4.0	3.8	3.8	35.9	38.0	51.0	49.8
Indep N Ireland	5.5	5.6	3.9	4.0	14.1	10.7	9.9	10.0
Other	6.8	3.1	1.6	1.8	2.6	4.6	2.7	2.9
Don't know	16.4	6.4	5.8	6.0	24.4	19.1	16.5	16.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(73)	(699)	(5,920)	(6,692)	(78)	(345)	(4,186)	(4,609)

*Questions: 'Do you think that the long-term policy for Northern Ireland should be for it to remain part of the United Kingdom or to re-unify with Ireland?'*

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.

**Table 9: Predictors of Support for Retention of the Union with Britain  
in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003 Pooled Sample**

	(Regression Coefficients)			
	Protestant		Catholic	
<i>Socio-demographic controls:</i>				
Gender (male)	.01	(.01)	-.03	(-.03)
Church attendance (attends)	-.01	(-.01)	-.03	(-.03)
Age (years)	-.01*	(-.04)	.01	(.03)
Education:				
Tertiary	-.09**	(-.14)	.01	(-.01)
Secondary	-.04**	(-.09)	-.01	(-.01)
No qualification <sup>a</sup>	----	----	----	----
Occupation (non-manual)	.01	(.01)	.03	(.03)
Employment (labour active)	.01	(.02)	.01	(.01)
<i>Congruency in identity (yes)</i>	.09**	(.21)	-.36**	(-.43)
<i>School Type:</i>				
Integrated	-.07*	(-.03)	.11	(.03)
Just mixed	-.01	(-.02)	.08**	(.05)
Segregated <sup>a</sup>	----	----	----	----
Constant	.93**		.48**	
R-squared	0.07		0.20	
(N)	(4,431)		(2,693)	

Note: The dependent variable is coded 1 (retain union with Britain), 0.5 (Independent Northern Ireland/Other) and 0 (united Ireland); Standardised regressions are in parentheses; <sup>a</sup>, dropped out category of comparison; \*, significant at the 0.05 level; \*\*, significant at the 0.01 level..

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 1998-2003; Northern Ireland Referendum and Election Survey, 1998; Northern Ireland Election Study, 2003.